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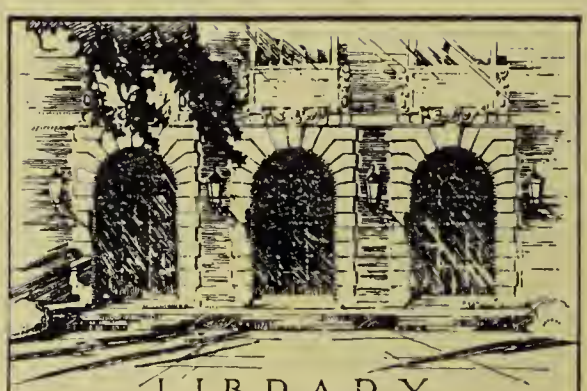

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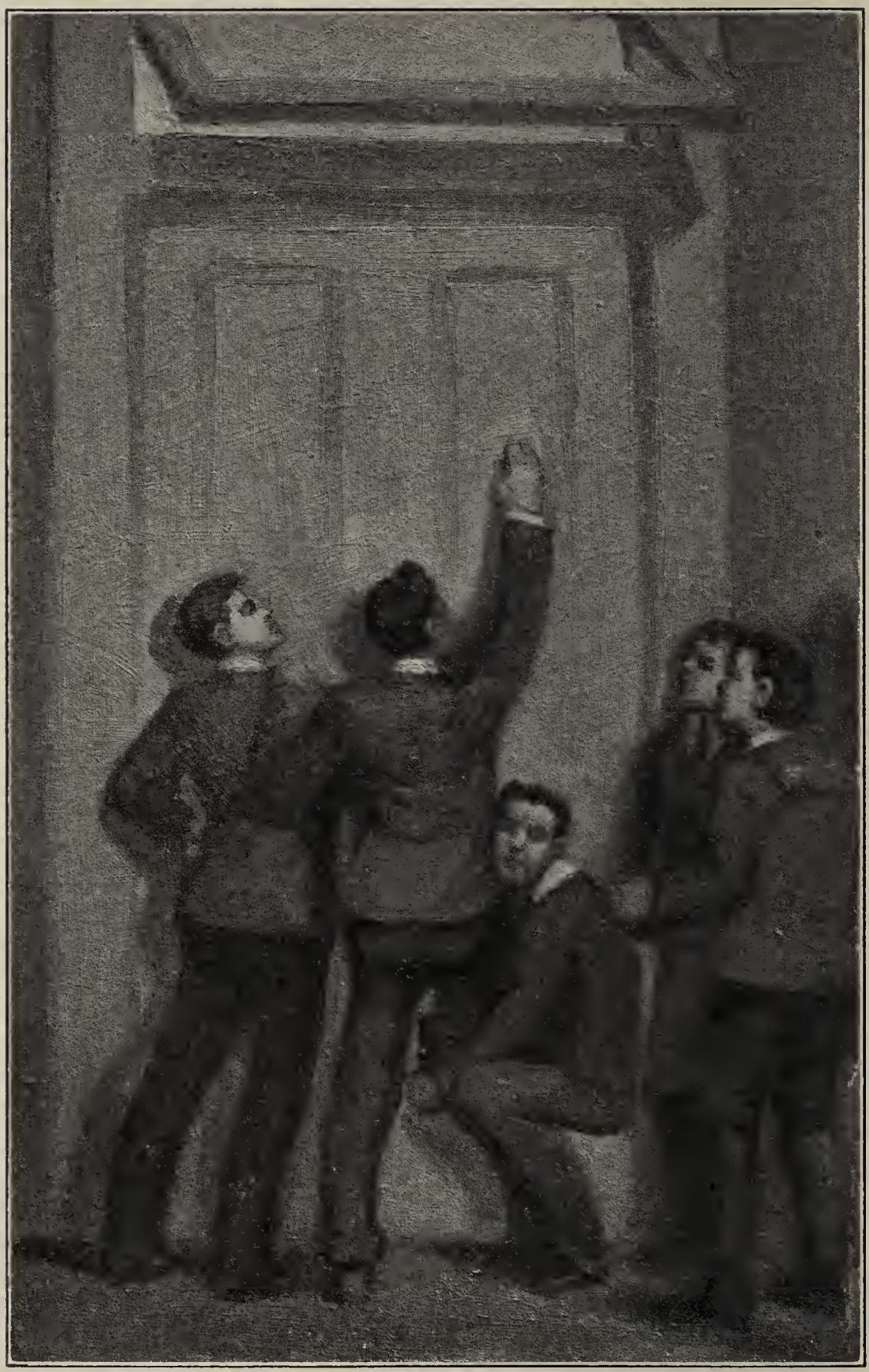

"HERE, FELLOWS," HE WHISPERED, "BOOST ME UP THERE."

The Caxton Club
AMOS R. WELLS
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New York

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CONTENTS.

Chapter.		Page.
I.	The Big Ben Franklin Press . .	1
II.	An Interesting Boy	7
III.	The Caxton Club is Formed . .	14
IV.	Editorial Trials and Triumphs .	22
V.	Who is "Lee Brane"?	27
VI.	The Feeble Effort	33
VII.	The Great Journalistic Trust .	39
VIII.	The Reform Campaign	44
IX.	The Woe of the Little Red Club-House	50
X.	Ben in Trouble	56
XI.	Hard Times	60
XII.	President Grace has a Word to Say	70
XIII.	N.A.P.A.	76
XIV.	Ho, for the Hub!	81
XV.	The Transom	90
XVI.	"Forgive Me!"	96
XVII.	President Earle	102

THE CAXTON CLUB.

I.

THE BIG BEN FRANKLIN PRESS.

"I THINK I have it this time!" said Mr. Colton, triumphantly.

"Have what?" asked his wife.

"Why, something to rouse Arthur!"

"He 's listless enough, poor fellow," sighed Mrs. Colton. "To-day I thought he looked very pale and languid. Oh, *why* did he have to have scarlet fever? He was such a bright and active little fellow. What is it you are going to try *now?*"

"It 's a —" began Mr. Colton, but cut himself short with the question, "Has n't it come?"

"Nothing has come."

"That 's strange. They said it should be here by six, sure. It 'll be here soon. Call Arthur, for I 'd like to have him on the spot."

Mrs. Colton smiled, for she saw that her husband was as eager as a boy for the coming toy,

whatever it was; more eager than the real boy was likely to be. Her heart was heavy as she went to call her son; for the lad, though surrounded with all the luxuries his rich banker father could think of, was spiritless, with a pale face and peevish ways. His poor health kept him much indoors, and he had a tutor instead of the joyous life of a school, and was without a single boy companion. His room was crammed with handsome books and elaborate games and toys, but he was always bored, and went wandering about the large, beautifully furnished house, in no corner of which had this only child chanced to find that richest of all possessions, happiness.

"Arthur," asked his father suddenly, as the boy and his mother entered the parlor, "what do you want most in all the world?"

"I don't know that I want anything, papa," answered Arthur. "Except, maybe," he added with a ghost of a smile, "to get rid of some of the things I have."

"When I was of your age," the banker went on, "there was just one thing I wanted above everything else on earth, and I could n't have it. I thought of it this morning — and I stepped around and ordered it sent up to *you!*"

Arthur did n't express the least interest.

His father looked disappointed, but went on.

"It will be here in a few minutes. Can you guess what it is?"

"No; of course not," Arthur replied, with a listless air.

"But you might make one guess at least, to please your father," suggested Mrs. Colton, gently.

"Oh, well, then, I guess an air-gun."

"You know you have an air-gun already, Arthur!"

"Yes, papa, and so I have everything else that I can think of."

A maid came to the door.

"The expressman, mum; and it 's a big thing they have — where will you want it put, mum?"

"Have it carried to my study, for the present," said Mr. Colton, rising. "Come, Arthur; come, mother!"

It was indeed a "big thing" they found in the study, with two expressmen puffing over it. Besides, there were several large boxes and a chest of little drawers. Dismissing the men, Mr. Colton turned on a blaze of light, and proceeded briskly to remove the wrappings.

There was a final cut of a cord, with a great rustle a lot of brown paper and excelsior fell to the floor — and there stood disclosed a printing-press, almost as tall as Arthur himself. It glis-

tened with gay paint, and its new steel surfaces flashed brightly.

"All ready for working," cried Mr. Colton, gleefully. "And Ben Franklin himself never had such a fine press as that — it 's *called* the Ben Franklin, by the way!"

"Why don't you take hold of the handle and make it go, Arthur?" asked Mrs. Colton.

"There 's nothing in it yet to print," objected Arthur, who had been sitting stretched out on a chair, watching his father through half-shut eyes.

Just then the dinner-bell rang, and Mr. Colton, rather discouraged, turned away without a word.

But after dinner he returned to his ungrateful task, and tried hard to interest his son, calling Arthur's tutor to his aid. Mr. Augustine Drayton was a very serious-minded young man, a doctor of philosophy, and deeply interested in the dead languages. He aspired to a college professorship, but at present was compelled to make his living by tutoring. He had no liking for boys, and though he did his work conscientiously, he was vastly bored by it. He stood by the new press, nearly as listless as Arthur, wishing himself upstairs with his Thucydides.

He presently roused, however, and joined in

the banker's efforts. They daubed the ink on the ink-plate, and worked the lever till it was evenly distributed, in a black, glossy sheet, over which the smooth roller glided oilily. Together, while Arthur stood by, they unpacked the shining type and put the letters in the proper boxes of the fresh, clean printer's cases, consulting an encyclopedia to find the right compartments. Then the two men took turns with the composing stick, and "set up" some verse — Longfellow's "Excelsior." They fastened the completed poem into the "chase," fixed it on the press, and drew off some copies on the best paper Mr. Colton had in his desk.

Arthur's father had enjoyed it all as if he had returned to his boyhood days, and the tutor got somewhat interested; but Arthur had offered to take little part. At his mother's wish he had put a few types into their boxes and "set up" a line of "Excelsior." His father told him to "pull a proof," and so he took hold of the lever and drew it, but scarcely glanced at the copy of the poem he had printed himself.

"Well, papa," he said at last, "I guess I'll go up to bed. We've tried the press enough, haven't we?"

Mr. Colton looked up in surprise from the proof he was correcting. He had put into type the first paragraph of the Declaration of Inde-

pendence, "just to try his hand on prose." It was so enjoyable that really he had scarcely noticed how little interest Arthur was taking.

"Why, Arthur!" he exclaimed, "I don't believe you are having half so good a time as I am! What *do* you want, anyway?"

Arthur looked away for a minute, and then the tears came up in his eyes.

"You 're as good as you can be, papa," he said at last, really stirred. "I 'm not ungrateful; and if you don't mind, I think there *is* one thing I want. I — want — a — chum!"

II.

AN INTERESTING BOY.

"I BELIEVE he 's right!"

Mr. Colton said this to his wife after Arthur had gone to bed and Mr. Augustine Drayton had retired thankfully to his Thucydides.

"But it seems rather hard," Mrs. Colton laughingly objected, "after you have done so much for him, made yourself his playmate, really devoted yourself to his smallest whim."

"Perhaps I made my mistake right there," said Mr. Colton. "Perhaps it would have been better to let him do more for himself. Anyway, I 'm pretty sure he has hit his need — a real live boy to play with and work with, instead of a middle-aged banker with a bald head."

Mr. Colton was a man of business, and when he saw a thing ought to be done he did it at once. Only two nights thereafter, while Mr. Colton was reading in his study, and his wife, sitting near, was playing a game of checkers with her son, there came a ring at the front door-bell, and the maid announced, "A boy to see Master Arthur!"

This in itself was a surprise. The like had never happened before.

"A boy to see me?" exclaimed Arthur, jumping up, while the checkers rolled in every direction. "What can he want? Where shall I see him, papa?"

"In the parlor," Mr. Colton answered, his eyes twinkling at his wife's surprise and his boy's eagerness. "And if it is some one come to stay awhile, you might take him up to your room."

Arthur found awaiting him in the parlor a manly lad, a little older than himself. He did not appear quite at his ease,— perhaps he had never been in so elegant a room before,— but his brown eyes looked Arthur straight in the face as he rose to introduce himself.

"I 'm Ben Earle," he said, "and your father told me you had a new printing-press and he 'd like me to give you some points about how to use it. I 'll be glad to, if you want me to, for my father is a printer and I 've worked with type since I was a baby."

"Indeed I 'd be glad!" answered Arthur, heartily. "In fact, for a long while I 've been just spoiling for some other fellow to do things with."

"Mr. Colton said you were n't very strong and did n't go out much," Ben said. "But now

what is it you particularly want to know about your press ? "

"Everything," laughed Arthur. "I never touched one before. But you can't show me about it down here. Come up to my room, won't you ? "

They mounted the broad stairs, therefore, and came to an apartment such as Ben had never even imagined. A great contrast it was to his own small, bare bed-chamber at home ! It was very large — the press seemed to take up no space at all — and the bed stood in a recess, so that a great deal of room was left for Arthur's many belongings. On the polished floor lay the softest of rugs, and on the wall were the merriest of paintings — frisky dogs, comical cats, clowns, courts of monkeys, as well as a beautiful landscape or two. There were several bookcases, stocked with such an array of volumes as made Ben look with longing eyes ; and everywhere there were toys — mechanical toys, grotesque toys, handsome toys, instructive toys, and toys "just for fun." Games galore. Indoor tennis, indoor croquet, indoor archery, everything indoor that you could think of.

Ben drew a long breath.

"My ! " he exclaimed. "You must have larks in such a room as this, even if you are n't very well ! "

"Larks!" answered Arthur. "You don't know. Why, I've been miserable most of the time ever since I can remember!"

Ben thought he meant that he was nearly always sick, and remained sympathetically silent.

In a good place on the polished floor, right in the big bay window, stood the shining new press, with its cases of type beside it. Ben went over to it at once.

"What a beauty!" he cried. "And how big! And a Ben Franklin, too. That's the best make. And, do you know, that's my name, too: Benjamin Franklin Earle. I'm very proud of it."

"*I* should be, if I had it," said Arthur, regretfully.

"You?" exclaimed Ben. "Why, yours is much finer — to be named after one of the noblest kings that ever lived! You ought to get some knights together! And you ought to have a Round Table!"

"I never thought of my name before as standing for anything," said Arthur. "I know what you mean, though."

Ben went all over the new press with enthusiasm, praising this part and showing its special excellence, pointing out the use of that part, making the whole machine very important and interesting in its owner's eyes. In fact, Ben was

an enthusiast in the splendid art of the printer. His father was foreman in the large office of the town paper, the leading paper of the county, *The Gardner Graphic.* He explained to Arthur many of the fascinating details of the work: how to hold the "composing-stick" — the steel box in which the type is "set up;" how to use an "em quad" in paragraphing; how to "space out" lines so that they would just fill the composing-stick, and be neither too tight to slip out easily nor so loose as to "pi;" how to "make up forms" — that is, how to arrange his "sticks" of type in the iron frame (the "chase") with "column rules" and "head rules" so as to make a page, and how to "lock it in" with the ingenious "quoins" so that the page became a compact whole; how to pad out the "tympan" on which the blank paper was placed, so as to get a good "impression;" how to regulate the ink-rollers; how to correct a proof; how, in short, to "turn out a good job."

That was one of Ben's favorite expressions, "turn out a good job," and Arthur soon caught his spirit, and came to understand and feel something of the pleasure there is in doing any sensible piece of work, and doing it in workmanlike fashion.

It was at the close of this most delightful evening that Ben proposed the Great Plan.

He had started to go several times, but Arthur, with eagerness, had insisted on his staying while they set up "just one thing more." They had printed part of Arthur's favorite poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and part of Ben's, "The Psalm of Life;" also a page of brief quotations with a neat border around it. They had paused at this point, and Arthur had proposed that they print a paper, when the Great Plan popped into Ben's head.

I will tell you how it was announced downstairs.

Mrs. Colton, still sitting in the study with her husband, had said for the tenth time, "I do wonder how the boys are getting along!"

"I wonder," said Mr. Colton, "whether Arthur is bored!"

"I wonder," said Mrs. Colton, "whether that Ben Earle is the right kind of boy for Arthur to be with!"

"I wonder," said Mr. Colton, "whether Arthur is treating him politely!"

"I wonder," said Mrs. Colton, "whether Arthur is n't getting all tired out!"

"I wonder," said Mr. Colton, "whether Arthur is becoming interested in that printing-press!"

It was at this point that the two in the study heard swift steps on the stairs, and Arthur burst

into the room, his eyes shining, his bearing alert, his entire appearance transformed. After him, more sedately, came Ben.

"Oh, mamma!" cried Arthur, interrupting the greetings; "oh, papa! Ben has just the finest scheme! And may I go into it? He 's printing a paper, and he knows another fellow who 's printing a paper, and I could print a paper, and he says if you 're willing we three could form a club together. And you 're willing, are n't you?"

III.

THE CAXTON CLUB IS FORMED.

ARTHUR'S interest in the idea of printing a paper grew greater instead of less, and the very next day he asked his mother's permission to visit Ben, and go with him to see the third boy of the proposed printers' club, — it being Saturday, Ben would not be in school, — and getting the permission, he rushed out of the house much like any other boy.

The Earles lived in a plain cottage, on a side street of the pretty college town. Mr. Earle had not yet returned from his day's work at the *Gardner Graphic* office, but Mrs. Earle was there, a kindly-faced, motherly woman; also Ben's sister Kate, of about Arthur's age, as bright a lassie as one would find in a day's journey.

Ben took Arthur up into his own room.

"Not much like yours," he said; and indeed it was n't.

Everything was orderly and wonderfully neat, but to Arthur's eye the room seemed bare and cold. The wall was white, but not papered.

The one table was of pine, and not covered. There was a square of worn carpet in the centre of the floor, and upon the wall were a few pictures of great men that Ben had cut from illustrated papers — Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin being conspicuous among them.

"You must see my books," said Ben. "They are not very many, but I get lots out of them."

There were only three shelves full — home-made shelves at that, but the books were beautifully kept, and Ben evidently knew all about them.

"Have you read this?" he asked, taking down Franklin's autobiography.

No. Arthur had it, and in an elegant leather binding, but he had n't read it. "I thought it would be dull," he said.

"Dull? Just read this page! And here! And here!" Arthur read, and saw that these favorite passages of Ben's were full of sprightliness and quaint good sense.

In that fashion Ben took Arthur through his library. He had "Ivanhoe" and "Kenilworth" and "Quentin Durward," he had Tennyson and Longfellow and Shakespeare, he had Green's "England" and Ridpath's "United States," he had Irving's Lives of Washington and Columbus, and he was especially proud of a good encyclopedia. Of course he had a Bible, and he

kept next to it a copy of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress."

"Of course you 'll have to excuse me," said Ben, after a while. "I never know when to stop when I get to talking about books, and you have so many — my talk must be an old story to you."

"I have the books," answered Arthur, "but you are the one who has the knowledge of them. I have n't read anything at all compared with you."

"I must show you my collections," said Ben.

They were well worth seeing, for Ben was a diligent collector of many things worth collecting as well as of a few things not worth it. Through his father's position on *The Gardner Graphic* he had a fine chance to gather postage stamps and post-marks, and he had improved his opportunity. He could talk about Servia and Roumania, about Natal and Korea and Trinidad. He had an excellent collection of Indian arrow-heads, hammers, pestles, mortars, tomahawks, picked up in the fields. Gardner is in a part of Ohio that abounds in fossils, and Ben could show shelf after shelf of these wonderful petrified animals, whose scientific names he had obtained from various college professors,— he could rattle them off by the dozen. He raised butterflies from the larvæ and had scores of

cigar boxes filled with lovely painted creatures. He was especially interested in snail shells, and had brought together, he was proud to tell Arthur, specimens of all the Gardner snails they could show at the college. *Helix albolabris*, *Helix tridentata*, *Helix hirsuta* — they were all neatly labelled.

This was a new world to Arthur, a world of active, original sport, sport that stood for something. It was quite different from the ready-made, patented games with which he had been trying all his life to amuse himself! He drew a big sigh of delight and admiration with every fresh exhibit. Ben became in his eyes a marvel of knowledge and industry; though, really, he was only a bright, ordinary American boy.

Of a sudden Arthur bethought himself of the purpose for which he had come.

"Where is it?" he asked. "Where is your press? And how about that other boy printer — can't we see him to-day?"

"Press?" laughed Ben. "Did you think I had a press? Why, I can't afford a press. There 's a little job press at the *Graphic* office my father lets me use on Saturdays. I work fast, and get my paper out on that. Yes, we can go to Caspar's. *He* has a press almost as fine as yours!"

Caspar Grace was the son of the college presi-

dent. The imposing buildings of Albemarle College, in their roomy, leafy campus, stood not far away.

"I always love to come here," Ben said as they entered the yard, "and I 'm going to the college, too, some day, if I have to work ten years to get the money."

A shrill whistle from Ben, long drawn out and rising and falling in a beautiful liquid way, brought Caspar to an upper window and speedily to the front door.

"That 's our 'flicker' call," Ben explained.

"Flicker?" asked Arthur.

"Yes. The flicker is a kind of woodpecker — a fine fellow. Don't you know him? I 'll introduce you some day. But first" — for Caspar was now on hand — "let me introduce you to Caspar Grace. This is Arthur Colton, Caspar."

Caspar proved to be a red-headed lad, of about Arthur's age. His eyes were of dancing blue, and his mouth always wanted to smile. He was seldom known to get angry, and though he was not very studious himself, he had a deep respect for Ben and his book knowledge.

"You got just the right fellow," he said to Arthur, "to show you how to run your press. What Ben does n't know about printing is n't worth knowing."

"Fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Ben. "My father would n't think of giving me any kind of position in the *Graphic* office yet."

Caspar led the way to his "den," as he called it. Back of the large mansion was a spacious barn, and in the loft a room had been fitted up especially for the one boy of the family. It was a delightful place, with the smell of the hay coming through the door, and the lovely spring sights and sounds and odors floating in through two large windows. There were shelves everywhere, for Caspar was a collector as enthusiastic as Ben, though far from Ben's equal in thoroughness and painstaking. In the place of honor stood a good-sized printing-press, somewhat smaller, however, than Arthur's magnificent "Ben Franklin," and near the windows, where they would get good light, were the cases of type.

"Behold," said Caspar with a flourish, "the editorial-rooms, composing-rooms, press-rooms, and mailing-rooms of *The Humbug!* Take a chair."

The one chair was given to Arthur as the guest of honor.

"And, by the way," Ben asked, "what will you call *your* paper, Arthur? Mine is *The Learner*. I 'm not quite so frank in the title as Caspar is."

"I don't know," Arthur faltered. "I've thought of a few names, but none of them suit me. You see, I don't know what sort of a thing it will turn out to be, and I'm so much in doubt that this morning I thought I'd just call it *The Query*."

"A capital name," said Caspar. "You can do anything you please under cover of that name."

"It's a new name," Ben added, "and a modest one, and I like it."

Then the boys fell to discussing the proposed club, and they grew very enthusiastic about it. They could hold regular meetings to criticise each other's work. They could read books about printing, a chapter at a meeting. They could have discussions over the best editorial methods. It would be great fun.

They decided that they did n't want a constitution.

"Everybody says constitutions are a nuisance," said Caspar, "and I move we don't have one unless we find we have to."

"But we must have a president," said Ben, "for we might want to pass a motion sometime, and we'd need some one to put the question."

So they chose Caspar president, because he was the son of a real president. Then they made Ben the secretary, because he could write

best, and Arthur the treasurer because his father was a banker. "Though, for that matter," said Caspar, "our funds are n't likely to drive a hole in your pocket very soon!

Then they fell to discussing the name; and they found it hard to find a good one. They discovered that their own names were an A, B, C — Arthur, Ben, and Caspar — and came near calling it "The Alphabet Club."

"That would n't be a bad name," declared Arthur, "since we shall have so much to do with the alphabet." But the others thought it sounded too much like primers.

"The Scribblers," "The Typos," "The Composing-stick Club," were all proposed in turn, only to be voted down unanimously.

At last, after they had been cudgelling their brains for some time, a victorious thought came to Ben. "Boys," said he, "we have forgotten the first English printer. Let 's call ourselves THE CAXTON CLUB!"

IV.

EDITORIAL TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS.

When Mr. Colton saw what a hold the new employment was gaining upon his sickly boy, how it was arousing him, and how much he was enjoying the companionship of Ben and Caspar, and what fine lads they were, and especially when he learned that they had gone on and organized a club, — when he realized all this, he was greatly pleased. So was Arthur's mother. And Mr. Augustine Drayton was also pleased, because Arthur almost at once became more interested in his lessons, and much more interesting to teach.

So greatly delighted was Mr. Colton that he presently sent for a carpenter and told him to meet the Caxton Club and plan with them for a club-house, to be built on the lawn back of his home.

Those were important meetings of the Caxton Club, to be sure! There were to be two rooms, one for Arthur's printing-office and one for the club-room. But which should be in front? And where should the windows be placed, and the door? How about the shelves? Where to put

the chimney? What should be the sign over the door? These are only a few of the great questions the club had to settle.

But in the meantime, while the carpenter was building this famous edifice, Arthur was not neglecting his printing. Ah, no! That was too satisfactory a pursuit to neglect for a day.

The first number of *The Query* cost him a vast amount of toil.

"At this rate," he said, "it won't be a weekly, or even a monthly, — it'll be an annual!"

For there was so much to learn! Mr. Augustine Drayton found it necessary to turn with his pupil from Greek grammar to modern English very often, for Arthur came almost every hour with some eager question about proof-reading. "Does the question point come after or before the quotation marks? Why do they put a period after Roman numerals? Should I have a colon here, or only a semi-colon? Is it better 'St.' or spelled out, 'Street'?" A dozen similar questions of good form and usage came up every day. Arthur was catching Ben's passion for thoroughness.

But proof-reading was easy compared with type-setting. First, Arthur had to "learn the case," and he found it decidedly difficult to dive into just the right little box for an m, an n, a u, an exclamation point, or a figure 5.

"If they would only put the small letters in alphabetical order, just like the capitals!" he cried, until Ben showed him that would be impossible, because some of the small letters are used so much more than others. The e-box, for instance, must be six times as large as the j-box.

Perhaps the most difficult part of the type-setting was taking the type from the "composing-stick" and placing it in the "chase." It needs a very delicate touch to get the lines of a page equally tight in the composing-stick and "spaced out" to just the right length, and it needs a strong hand and a firm grasp to lift fifteen lines or so, with their hundreds of little bits of metal, and not drop one. And if one falls, they are all likely to fall after it. How Arthur envied the other two boys the easy skill with which they performed this operation! To gain it cost him many a "piece of pi."

But if proof-reading was hard and type-setting harder, the hardest of all was the printing. The ink must be spread evenly on the roller. The type must be exactly level. The paper must not slip, and it must be well "backed-up," so as to "take an even impression." It must not blur. It must be handled carefully, so as not to be crumpled or soiled. It must not "off-set;" that is, the fresh ink of one sheet must not print itself on the blank page of the sheet laid on top of it.

It was a proud moment when Arthur could take the first number of *The Query* down into the study and exhibit it.

"Arthur, it is admirable," said his father, looking at his bright eyes and red cheeks.

"My dear boy, it 's just splendid!" cried his mother, smiling back to his smile.

"A highly creditable production," declared Mr. Augustine Drayton, nodding at his exulting pupil.

"Tip-top!" said the other members of the Caxton Club.

Really, for a first number, it *was* a good bit of work, and I wish I could show you a copy right here. But Arthur soon got to doing so much better that he was ashamed of his earlier efforts, and confiscated all he could lay hands on.

When Arthur could print clean copies, he set about obtaining subscribers for *The Query*. This was not difficult, since the price was only twenty-five cents a year, except for the fact that Arthur at that time knew so very few persons; but all his household had to subscribe, cook, coachman, gardener, waitress, and all. He soon bethought himself to send "sample copies" to all his relatives, and at last he had a subscription-list quite as large as that of *The Humbug* or of *The Learner*.

Soon after this important event — the regular appearance of *The Query* — the Caxton Club took possession of its club-house. Surely never before did boys have such a charming meeting-place. It was a neat one-story building, with a sloping roof, an abundance of windows, a porch before the door, and as it stood among trees it was painted the gayest of reds. Inside, the printing-office was fitted up with every necessity of a first-class establishment, including an excellent assortment of the most useful kinds of type, selected by Ben's father. In the rear was the club-room, brightly carpeted, and furnished with a big round table, half a dozen chairs, a desk, a book-case, and some attractive pictures.

On taking possession they had a little celebration — not unmixed with cake and ice-cream. But the best part of the celebration was something Arthur said to Ben.

"I want you, old fellow," said Arthur, "to take this printing-shop in partnership with me, and just use it as if it were your own. Here 's one of the keys to it; and you 'll do it, won't you, and get out your paper on this press instead of at the *Graphic* office, and everything? Come, *please* say you will!"

And by Arthur's tone Ben knew that he meant the offer with all his heart.

V.

"WHO IS LEE BRANE?"

THE CAXTON CLUB had not long enjoyed its fine quarters before it was confronted with a genuine problem. It came up in this way.

"Gentlemen," said President Caspar, as the three were seated at their round table looking over the exchanges, "I have to present to you an application for membership."

"What!" exclaimed Arthur, quite forgetting the proprieties of parliamentary law. "Some one wants to join the Caxton Club? Who is it?"

"It's Dick Grimes," answered Caspar, suddenly descending from his presidential dignity.

"Dick Grimes!" Ben exclaimed. "Oh, he'll never do!"

"That's what I thought; but he made me promise to propose his name."

"What's the matter with Dick Grimes?" asked Arthur. "Who is he, anyway?"

Caspar answered. "He's the son of Mr. Grimes, the postmaster. He runs a paper, too. He calls it *The Herald* — not a very bright name, but as bright as he is. I don't object to him

because he is n't bright, though, for I 'm not bright myself; but he 's a mean, underhand boy. He plagues the girls, and he is ugly to the small boys, and he plays silly tricks in school, and he smokes cigarettes and — swears."

"Well," said Arthur with emphasis, "the Caxton Club does n't want to have anything to do with him."

"Of course not," Ben agreed; and Caspar was authorized to give Dick the disagreeable information.

"He 'd have added one more letter, though, to our alphabet — A, Arthur; B, Ben; C, Caspar; D, Dick;" said Caspar, half regretfully.

"No," answered Ben, "for his real name is R, Richard."

"Then we 'll not consider him," said Caspar, "at least, till we have filled up the alphabet to R."

That was what Caspar actually did tell Dick; and the whole affair had some very exciting and important results, which I shall relate farther on.

I said that when this question came up the boys were sitting around the table in their club-room, reading exchanges; for both Ben's *Learner* and Caspar's *Humbug* had a goodly list of papers which they received in exchange, and Arthur was not slow to imitate them and obtain an "exchange list" of his own.

I wonder how many of my readers have ever heard of the N.A.P.A.? It will be necessary for them to understand what that important organization is.

Be it known, therefore, that in these United States are hundreds of boys, who, like our A, B, C, are printing little papers, partly for fun and partly for the training they thus get in the arts of printing and writing. They call themselves "amateurs," as distinguished from the "professionals" who run papers for a livelihood. I myself was an "amateur" when a boy, and I am now a "professional." Scores of others have taken the same course.

These hundreds of boys have organized themselves into the National Amateur Press Association, or N.A.P.A. This association has members all over the United States. It holds national meetings, usually in some large city. The boys attend, often in considerable numbers. They listen to essays regarding their work, and they hold profound discussions. Especially, they elect their national officers. In preparation for the latter event, the most animated debate has been conducted during the preceding year by all the amateur papers, each with its favorite candidate. Indeed, no sooner is one president installed than the entire amateur world is at ears over the question as to who shall be his successor.

The Caxton Club had the pleasant habit of meeting to open their week's exchanges together. What excitement there was as the three piles of yellow-wrapped papers were laid on the table, and one after another was freed from its crinkly envelope!

"Here 's a new one!" Caspar cried; "and — of — all — things!"

He held up a tiny sheet, only three inches square, — *The Dot.*

Each of the other boys found a copy among his exchanges, marked with a blue X, which is equivalent to a request for an exchange.

"And here 's another new one!" shouted Ben. "A bright idea!" And he held up for admiration a copy of *The Brown Study*, printed on brown wrapping-paper, and full of funny sayings.

"The *Stylus*," remarked Arthur, "is larger than usual this month." He passed around his copy of a paper which was the special delight of all of them, for its elegant printing and the polish and force of the editor's writing. It was published in Boston, and these Ohio boys looked upon it as embodying all the literary glories of the Modern Athens.

"Splendid!" Caspar declared, examining it. "They are beginning to use illustrations, too. What enterprise they have! And they have an article by Lee Brane!"

"Is that so?" Arthur asked. "Let 's see it. He 's the best writer in all the N.A.P.A., I think. Don't you, Ben?"

"No, indeed," Ben answered.

"Well, I agree with Arthur," said Caspar. "Lee Brane is always level-headed, and he always says something, and puts it in such a way that you 'll remember it. And he writes for so many papers, too! He must be an industrious fellow."

"Here 's an editorial about him," Arthur said, glancing over a copy of *The Illinois Item*, "nominating him for president of the N.A.P.A. He 'd make a good one. Why — why — why — *ee!* Just listen, fellows!" And Arthur read:

"We believe that in all the range of Amateurdom no writer can be found who is the equal of Lee Brane. The N.A.P.A. would honor itself in honoring him. The professional world will welcome him some day. *The Item* is proud to be the first to put his name in nomination for presidency. Probably if he did not live in the small and somewhat obscure town of Gardner, Ohio, he would have been nominated long ago by a dozen journals."

"There 's no one named Lee Brane in this town!" declared Ben.

"No; and so it must be a pen-name," Caspar thoughtfully added. "Who can it be?"

"It could n't — it could n't *possibly* be Dick Grimes?" asked Arthur, anxiously.

"Absurd!" laughed Caspar. "Why, Dick could no more write one of Lee Brane's articles than he could eat his own head!" That was a favorite comparison of Caspar's, and sufficiently conclusive.

"But there is no other boy in town running an amateur paper, is there?" Arthur asked.

"Not unless he 's doing it in secret," answered Caspar. "See here; I know the handwriting of all the Gardner boys, and I 'm going to write and ask Lee Brane for an article. That may give us a clew."

"I 'll do the same," said Arthur.

"And I," said Ben.

This they did; and at the meeting of the club a fortnight hence they all had manuscripts from Lee Brane to exhibit.

And every word — even the name — was typewritten!

VI.

THE FEEBLE EFFORT.

One Saturday afternoon Arthur was sitting in his "sanctum," as he was fond of calling the front room of the club-house, when there came a modest tap at the door. On opening it, Arthur found there a tiny old lady, whose face was covered by a thick veil.

"Is this the editor of *The Query?*" she asked, in a quavering voice.

"I am the editor of *The Query*," Arthur replied, with sudden dignity. "Walk in, please."

The little old lady entered and took the chair that Arthur politely handed her. Then she fumbled in a small, old-fashioned reticule and brought out a neatly folded sheet of paper.

"I have a little poem here," she said, "which I wrote myself. I am a poetess, you know. You have heard of me, have n't you, sir?"

Arthur never had, but he was too polite to say so, and so stammered and grew red in the face. But the little old lady went on without noticing him.

"The critics say that my recent poems have been very fine. You think so, don't you, sir?"

Arthur was more embarrassed than before, but his visitor went serenely on.

"This poem is on spring. The lovely violets suggested it. Have you seen any violets yet, sir?"

Arthur was glad to be able to say that he had.

"Then you will understand what a gush of feeling came over me when I saw the first spring violets. So I wrote this poem. May I read it to you, sir?"

"Certainly," said polite Arthur.

The poetess cleared her throat and began:

POEM ON SPRING.

"O lovely Spring, with violets and such,
With dandelions, buttercups, and Dutch-
Man's breeches, and with balmy breezes too,
I take my pen in hand to write on you,
O lovely Spring!

"O lovely Spring, so beautiful and fair,
With clover, cowslip, cress, and maidenhair.
The cows are happy, hear their gentle moos;
Both they and I of all the seasons choose
You, lovely Spring!

"O lovely Spring, praised up by every tongue,
By Milton, Lowell, me, and Shakespeare sung,
How very proud and thankful you must be,
Especially to be writ up by me,
O lovely spring!"

"Is n't that be-e-*eau*tiful?" asked the little old lady, looking up.

Arthur was choking with silent laughter, but this question sobered him. What should he say? Luckily, the poetess did n't pause for him to say anything.

"Of course you want to print it in *The Query*," she said, "and I 'll let you. And I won't charge you anything for it, as I understand that you are just beginning, and I like to help beginners along. Of course, you realize that it gives quite a reputation to a paper to publish one of my pieces."

"Does it?" the editor of *The Query* managed to say.

"Of course it does!" the visitor answered sternly.

But Arthur had a bright idea. "If you will please put your address on the poem," he said, "I will look it over carefully, and I will return it promptly if I see that I cannot find space for it."

"Oh, but you 'll *make* room for it!" answered the old lady. However, she wrote upon the manuscript with a stubby pencil, made a funny little courtesy, and trotted away.

Not long afterward the rest of the Caxton Club came in, and Arthur in high glee told his experience. "My first spring poet!" he crowed. "But I slid her out neatly, did n't I?"

"An editor of twenty years' standing could n't have done it better," answered Ben.

"Read the poem," Caspar demanded, and chuckled over the verses as Arthur read them.

"What 's her name?" asked both the boys at the close.

Arthur looked at the pencilled words, and burst into a shout of merriment.

"Sold! Sold!" he cried. "And who would ever have thought it of her?"

On the manuscript was written simply, "Kate Earle, April 1."

"Well," said Ben and Caspar, "Kate has fooled us, as well as you. We 've been playing April-fool tricks all day, but we never once suspected this! We saw her as she came out of the grounds."

Kate Earle was a very bright sister to have. Ben thought so, and it was not long before he brought before the Caxton Club another evidence of her brightness.

It seems that Kate had asked him one day, jestingly, why there were no girls in the club; and he had answered, half in fun and half in earnest, that girls could n't get out a paper, and it would be a feeble effort if they did.

In high glee, therefore, Ben exhibited at one of the club's Saturday councils a copy of what he called a "brand-new exchange."

"I 'm ahead of you here, fellows," he boasted. "You can't get this on your exchange list, for there 's only one copy printed, and *The Learner* is proud to have that."

Accordingly he placed before Arthur and Caspar the new journal.

THE FEEBLE EFFORT.

Vol. 1. Gardner, O., April 22, 1890. No. 1.

Introductory.

This journal is a feeble effort. It does not pretend to be anything else; and it does not suppose it possible to be anything else. For it is edited by a girl.

In its poor, feeble way, it will look at events and things, and give its opinion upon them with what force it can muster.

It has no fighting editor, for girls cannot bear arms. And no managing editor, for girls cannot manage. And no sporting editor, for girls know nothing about horse races and prize fights. And no editor-in-chief, for how could a girl be anything but a subordinate?

It has not got it through its feeble intellect just how it is to be edited, but in some insipid way or other it will appear monthly, or as near monthly as the maker of The Feeble Effort can manage it.

KATE EARLE.

That was the introduction, and the rest of the

paper corresponded. It was witty and sharp, sensible and forcible, and was altogether a piece of excellent writing for such a young girl. It was all typewritten, for Kate had access to no printing-press, but her father let her use his typewriter. It was complete, with editorials, contributed articles, departments, news items, and advertisements. In short, *The Feeble Effort* was anything but feeble.

"Kate ought to be a member of the Caxton Club!" cried Arthur.

"If she only had a press, what an editor she would be!" cried Caspar.

It was not long before, in the upsetting of the affairs of the club about which I shall have to tell you, Kate found a place, and filled it well. For now I must hurry on to a series of exciting events, that changed the lives of all my three heroes and entirely revolutionized the Caxton Club.

VII.

THE GREAT JOURNALISTIC TRUST.

DICK GRIMES was not a boy that could be slighted with safety. His father, you will remember, was the village postmaster, and he was as revengeful as his son. When Dick told him of his rejection by the Caxton Club, Mr. Grimes was furious. "I'll fix these boys!" he declared, with an ugly smile.

And he did, in a way they little expected.

The members of the Caxton Club assembled one Saturday afternoon with wrath and dismay upon their faces. Each had a letter in his hand, a communication marked "Official Business," from the postmaster. Arthur's letter was a curt refusal of his recent request to be admitted to the privileges of second-class mail matter. Ben's, and Caspar's also, was an equally curt statement that *The Humbug* and *The Learner* would no longer be considered eligible under the same class.

"Second-class rates" are the very low rates of one cent a pound, granted to publishers upon their periodicals. Newspapers that are not given

these "pound rates" must be paid for at the much higher rate of one cent for each four ounces.

"I 've been to see him," said Arthur.

"So 've I."

"And I."

"He showed me a letter from the third assistant postmaster-general at Washington, saying that our subscription lists were too small, and the number of free copies too large, to warrant putting us in the second class."

"Showed it to me."

"And me."

"Of course the Washington authorities based their decision on what Mr. Grimes chose to tell them," said Caspar.

"Why should n't *we* write to the third assistant postmaster-general, and protest?" Arthur asked.

"What good would it do?" Ben inquired. "I suppose it 's true that we have only a few subscribers and a lot of free copies, exchanges and so on. What I don't like is drawing the line on us just for spite. Every other amateur paper in the country is carried at the pound rate."

That was the sting. Mr. Grimes had not damaged the boys much in their pocketbooks, for the difference in postage would be little on

their tiny editions; but he had hurt them sorely in their journalistic pride. It means much to an "amateur," a member of the N.A.P.A., that he is able to print on his front page, just like *The Tribune* or *The Herald:*

"Entered as second-class mail matter at the post-office at Gardner, O."

And really, since the supposedly low newspaper rates were established to aid the education of the people, there is no reason why they should not be granted to boys' papers, in spite of their small subscription lists and large exchange lists. They are as able an aid to education, I am sure, at least for boys, as half the newspapers that enjoy the "pound rates" without question!

"What we need to do," said Ben, after they had talked over the matter angrily for some time, "is to get larger subscription lists. Then we could appeal to Washington and gain the day."

"But how can we get larger subscription lists?" asked Caspar. "I 'm sure I can't bully any one else into taking *The Humbug.*"

"And I can't persuade any one else to take *The Query*," sighed Arthur, "except as a gift; and that would n't mend matters."

Then it was that Ben proposed the Great Journalistic Trust.

"I 've been thinking for some time, boys," he said, "that it would be a capital plan for us to

combine forces, subscription lists and all, and publish only one paper. We could make it shine, among us."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted Arthur and Caspar, waving sheets of paper at the editor of *The Learner*. "Great mind, Ben!"

The idea was entertained with increasing enthusiasm the more the boys discussed it.

"We could make it eight pages!"

"We could have a picture every month!"

"We could get contributions that would count!"

"We could be an influence in the N.A.P.A."

"And in the town!"

"Boys," said Ben at that, his eyes eager, "I think *that's* what we want to look after — to be an influence in the town! I have read that the papers that succeed are those that set out to do things. Now, if we really try to accomplish something here in Gardner, people will begin to talk about the paper, and then they'll begin to subscribe for it."

"And there are enough things in Gardner that need reforming, I'm sure," remarked Caspar.

Then Arthur made his great contribution. "Why not call it *The Reformer?*" he asked.

"The very name!" Ben cried. "I've been trying to think of a good name, and you've just hit it!"

Arthur beamed with pride, and ventured another suggestion:

"Then why not add Kate to our list of editors? She could n't set type, I suppose, though I 'm not so sure of that, either; but she can write capitally."

"And she can get subscribers," added Caspar.

"It 's a vote!" declared Arthur, quite forgotting that he was n't the president of the club.

Thus another important matter was settled, and Kate Earle became the fourth member.

"Only it 's too bad you are not a D," said Caspar, at the first meeting when Editor Kate was present.

"I *am* a D," Kate answered brightly; "Catherine *Davenport* Earle!"

VIII.

THE REFORM CAMPAIGN.

THE plans of the Caxton Club met with prompt success. The very name of the new paper was so audacious that it won people's attention.

A great many laughed at it. "Those boys are delightfully conceited," they said, "to be setting themselves up as reformers!"

The criticism was a just one, as the Club found out by a bitter experience.

However, there were really many points in the village life of Gardner that needed improvement, and the boys — *and* the girl — wrote concerning them vigorously. They had the good sense to ask the advice and win the coöperation of their elders. Mr. Colton joined the editorial conferences now and then, and the boys found in him a very practical assistant.

"Take the streets of Gardner," said he, at the start. "Why, they are in a disgraceful condition. Great ruts are everywhere, the gutters are waist-high with weeds, the roads are unsafe for bicycles and very uncomfortable for carriages."

At his suggestion the boys interviewed a dozen of the leading men of the place and got their opinions about the Gardner streets, also their recommendations for improvements. Then the Caxton Club devoted the entire first number of *The Reformer* to the subject, quoting largely from authorities on roadmaking, and backing up their statements with the interviews.

The *Gardner Graphic* was owned by Mr. Grimes and one or two other men like him — men who "ran" the politics of the town, and largely profited from the lax management of public affairs. Gardner, therefore, had never before been treated to any frank and fearless discussion of the question of good roads, and the whole town thoroughly enjoyed the novelty.

"Seen what the boys are up to?" was the question at the groceries, the drug stores, the railroad station, and the post-office, wherever men were in the habit of lounging.

Then the speaker would produce from his pocket a worn copy of *The Reformer*, Vol. I., No. 1, and read a paragraph from some bright editorial, or the opinion of the Methodist minister, or the sarcastic remark of President Grace, all "giving it" to the village street commissioners. Every one likes to read what is bold, positive, determined — writing that has a courageous purpose back of it; and it is safe to say

that every adult in Gardner read that number of the *The Reformer*.

For the Caxton Club sent out sample numbers freely, instructing Mr. Grimes (who was sour enough about it) to put a copy in every box in the post-office. He was sharp enough in turn about the one-cent stamp on every copy of the paper; but the club expected to get its money back in subscriptions.

It was not long before Kate was unanimously chosen subscription agent of the new venture. Elated at her election to the club, that lassie was bent on being of service. She carried a copy of *The Reformer* with her wherever she went, and "tackled" as the boys called it, "every man, woman, child, and cow on the street." Her face was so bright and her arguments were so ready, and, best of all, the paper itself was so good, that the quarter-dollars flew out of pockets, and every week she handed over to Treasurer Colton a goodly sum.

The second number of *The Reformer* took for its subject a matter which was agreed upon by the club only after long discussion — the village post-office, and the way it was conducted.

"Mr. Grimes will say we did it out of revenge," was Ben's warning.

"Well, let him," answered Caspar; "there *is* a little revenge in it, I admit, but we have a

right to be indignant at him. And, any way, the post-office is run so poorly that we should have had to take it up even if Mr. Grimes had treated us decently."

So at last they decided to carry the war into this domain of Uncle Sam's, though I think that none of them felt quite easy in mind about it, and all of them feared it would have the aspect of mere revenge. The result quite justified their uneasiness.

But this second issue was a good number, even better than the first. The Gardner post-office certainly was in a bad condition. For years it had been looked upon as the spoils of party victories. If the Republicans elected a president, the Democratic postmaster was routed out and a Republican installed; and as soon as the Democrats gained the day in a national election, the position was speedily reversed. There was no inducement, therefore, for a worthy man to take the place.

Postmaster Grimes, like his predecessors, spent only a small part of his time at the office, and hired cheap and ignorant assistants. Mails were carelessly assorted and still more carelessly delivered. Mistakes in money orders were frequent and mischievous. Valuable letters were given to the wrong persons, opened, and sent to their owners only after vexatious delays.

Papers and magazines were crumpled and soiled. Special delivery letters were delivered — after Dick got out of school. The office was kept in a most slovenly condition, foul with tobacco smoke, and full of loud-voiced loafers. There were even rumors of the opening of letters containing money and the theft of their contents. Throughout his whole term Mr. Grimes and his subordinates had maintained an air of insolence and incivility that was unendurable. There had been frequent threats of complaint to Washington, but no one had cared to take the lead.

It may be imagined, therefore, how joyfully the second number of *The Reformer* was received. What matter if it was edited by three boys and a girl? It voiced with decision the long-pent feelings of the town. It assailed a foe to the public welfare.

Nor was it entirely the work of three boys and a girl, by any means. Pursuing the same policy as before, Ben and his associates had obtained expressions of opinion from many men and women. This matter was more personal than the street-reform, and only the more courageous were willing that their names should be used; but the editors grouped the contributions effectively under the headings: "Interviews with Leading Merchants," "What our Professional Men Think about It," "The Judgment

of Representative Women," and the like; and there were enough signed articles to give to the protest the power of personal influence.

Every one in town, except the "political machine," the postmaster, and his immediate followers, was full of satisfaction. But Mr. Grimes and Dick were raging. None of the Caxton Club could enter the post-office without meeting with abuse and sneers. Finally, three days after the publication of the number, the counter-blow fell.

It was Arthur's custom, early every morning, to snatch a few minutes before breakfast to run down the lawn and take a peep into his beloved "sanctum." So greatly had the manly work transformed him that he no longer showed or felt a trace of the old listlessness.

With a bound and a leap, on this particular May morning, he reached the door of the club-house. But he stopped short in dismay. The pretty sign, "The Caxton Club," which had swung in dainty white and gold over the door, was wrenched from its fastenings and lay, a pile of splinters, on the ground.

His heart beating hard, Arthur opened the door, looked in, and gave a cry of horror. The entire building was a wreck!

IX.

THE WOE OF THE LITTLE RED CLUB-HOUSE.

It was indeed a wretched sight that Arthur saw.

The window, by which entrance had been made, lay on the floor, the glass in fragments. On the floor also, in an indescribable confusion, was the broken office furniture. The type drawers had been pulled out, overturned, trampled on, the precious types flung in handfuls here and there. Countless bits of lead littered the room. The ink-can had been seized, and its contents smeared over the walls. Paper of all kinds had been torn up or crumpled up. Most appalling of all, the beautiful press, the Ben Franklin, the pride of Arthur's heart, had been wrenched from its place, overthrown, and twisted and battered till it was almost unrecognizable.

Giving one heartbroken glance around, Arthur made his way over all this ruin to the inner room, the meeting-place of the Caxton Club.

Here, if possible, the destruction was still more thorough. The costly table was splintered

and its legs were torn off. The pictures lay on the floor, mere mangled remnants. The shelves were torn down, and fragments of mutilated books had been tossed here and there. Not a chair in the room but was smashed. The ink-bottles had been thrown at the neatly papered wall, and great black spots were the result. The desk was upset and demolished. Not a hint remained of the glory of the Caxton Club.

Arthur rushed to the house, every breath coming very much like a sob. Poor fellow! It was his first taste of opposition. Until that time he had never known, in all his protected life, the bitterness of an enemy.

Speedily his father and his mother made their way out to the little red club-house, with exclamations of sympathy. Mr. Augustine Drayton appeared too, especially indignant at the wanton destruction of so many books. The coachman came running up from the stable, and cook and maids came running down from the house, and all looked in at the door with horrified faces.

Mr. Colton went back to the house presently and telephoned orders for a detective to be sent from the nearest city. He suspected that Dick Grimes was at the bottom of the outrage; for Arthur had told him how Dick's application for membership in the club had been refused, and how Mr. Grimes had retaliated by depriving the

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boys of their newspaper mailing rates. Mr. Colton had seen the last number of *The Reformer*, and he judged that it had been the final spark that had caused Dick's rage to burst into flame.

In the meantime, too excited to think of breakfast, Arthur was speeding to the homes of the other members of the Caxton Club and summoning them to the scene of ruin.

Kate and Caspar were loud in their indignation, but Ben took the matter philosophically. "It 's just what all radical reformers have had to meet," he said. "I begin to feel a little like Lovejoy and Garrison."

As the news got out, the entire village joined in the indignation — all, that is, except those whose opposition *The Reformer* had already aroused.

The members of the Caxton Club did not keep their opinions secret, though the detective, when he came, blamed them for not doing so. But the Colton servants, if no one else, would have spread them far and wide, so angry were they that any one should harm the property of their young master.

Presently our editors saw the opportunity for a journalistic feat, and grasped it promptly. Leaving the wrecked building as it was for the detective to examine, the Caxton Club (for it

chanced to be a Saturday and there was no school) repaired to Caspar's office in the barn. Since the consolidation of the three papers this room, once so busy, had been given up to the mice, but that Saturday morning it was a hive of activity. Pencils flew, fingers dived rapidly after the type, Caspar's press limbered up its rusty joints, and early in the afternoon the Caxton Club were distributing extras to their subscribers and all their village friends — indeed, to any one that would take them.

THE REFORMER — EXTRA!

A DASTARDLY DEED!

THE REFORMER'S OFFICE WRECKED!

Midnight Marauders and the Ruin they Wrought! Was Revenge the Motive?

These "scare heads" were followed by a full account of the affair, a graphic pen-picture of the dismantled office, ending with a hint of the enmity *The Reformer* had excited, and of the probability that this was the cause of the outrage.

The interest aroused by the first two numbers

of the paper was greatly deepened by this striking "extra."

"Things have come to a pretty pass in Gardner!" people cried.

"It 's plain to be seen who did it!" was every one's remark.

Every one's, that is, but the detective's. He was a very commonplace young man, as different as possible from the romantic ideal the boys had formed.

"*He* a detective!" Caspar exclaimed. "Why, he does n't look as if he ever assumed a disguise in his life." Probably he never had.

"*He* a detective!" cried Kate. "Why, he never once spoke in a whisper, and he did n't say a word about a clue, and he did n't go nosing around in a single corner, looking for signs and footprints."

As a matter of fact, however, Mr. Colton knew Mr. Gray to be a very shrewd detective; and after he had spent several days on the case, and reported that he saw "nothing in it," the banker let him go back to the city. Indeed, Dick Grimes, if Dick had done it, had left no tracks, and was giving no evidence. The boys, to be sure, thought that his face wore a look of triumph; but, as the detective explained, you can't bring a look of triumph into court and show it to a jury.

Fortunately for the Caxton Club, Mr. Colton

was a rich man, and at once set about the task of restoring the ruined club-house to its former condition. Walls and floor were cleaned. New furniture was installed. A press was bought, the mate of the wrecked "Ben Franklin." Indeed, with the experience they had already had, the boys were able to improve greatly upon their old quarters, both in beauty and in convenience. The Caxton Club came out of its troubles with colors flying.

X.

BEN IN TROUBLE.

But a new trouble was approaching, and one that I do not want to tell about. It is the only event in the whole story that I shall not enjoy relating. It happened in this way.

One evening Caspar went to the post-office to mail some letters. The post-office seemed deserted, there was no one visible outside or inside. Caspar had to buy some stamps, and he saw a large box full lying open on a shelf just back of the delivery window. Impatiently he pushed against the rusty iron screen of the window and felt it give; it was unlocked.

In an instant the spirit of mischief, mingled with the thought of revenge, took possession of the boy. He pushed open the screen, made a long arm, grasped the box, and hurried away with it in the deepening twilight.

But no sooner was Caspar outside the door than the shameful fact of what he had done burst upon him.

He was a thief!

"Thief!" a maple tree seemed to hiss at him,

rubbing its leaves together under a gentle breeze.

"Thief!" a dog seemed to bark, running around the corner toward him.

"Thief! Thief!" an inner voice cried, loudest of all.

Caspar looked back, terrified, into the office. He fancied he heard steps. He never could put the stamps back safely. He must run with them.

His heart gave a wild leap. What way should he run? The post-office was fairly in the centre of the village, and stores were in every direction, their bright lights beginning to flash across the sidewalk. Caspar clung to the shadow of the side of the building as if it were his only safety.

"Run! Run!" something said to him.

The poor fellow ran, throwing away the box of stamps at the first corner, without stopping to see where it fell.

Then came the strange part of it all.

Ben also, unluckily, had letters to mail that night; and, unluckily, his letters were stamped, so that he deposited them at once, and walked out. Unluckily, too, while he was walking out, Dick Grimes returned to the office through the back door, saw the open delivery window, and saw that the stamps were gone.

It all happened in a minute.

Dick dashed after Ben, shouting, "Stop, thief!"

with all the power of his strong lungs. He pounced upon Ben just at the place where the stamps had been thrown away, and at the same time he caught sight of the box lying at the base of a fence, the red sheets glowing with light from a street lamp.

Dick had certainly seen that Ben had no box under his arm. He had seen that Ben was walking leisurely and not running. He knew that Ben had not thrown the stamps where they lay. But his cunning brain at once as certainly perceived that here had come a chance for great mischief, and he raised the cry of "Thief!" louder than ever.

"Thief!" cried several men, running out from the shops. "Why, Dick Grimes, what 's the matter?"

"Thief!" screamed Dick. "Ben Earle 's been stealing stamps! Help! Hold him, somebody!"

"I have n't!" cried Ben, indignantly. "Let go of me!" and he wrenched himself loose.

"Don't let him go!" shouted Dick. "Here are the stamps, where he just threw them away."

"Why, this is serious," said one of the men.

"Where 's Sanders? Sanders ought to look into this," said another.

Sanders was the village constable, a butcher by trade, and his shop was only a short distance away. He was soon on the spot, brought there

by Dick's excited screams. Sanders belonged to the set of politicians that had for so long held sway over affairs in Gardner, and his little eyes glistened when he saw that his prisoner was Ben Earle.

"You come along with me," he said, taking Ben roughly by the collar. "And you, Dick, and all the rest of you men, be at the squire's for witnesses at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Come along now, Ben Earle."

And Ben Earle was locked up for the night in the village jail.

XI.

HARD TIMES.

It was early the next morning when Kate Earle rang the front-door bell at the house of President Grace. Caspar himself chanced to open it.

"Why, what 's the matter?" he asked, as soon as he saw her. For Kate's eyes were red and swollen, and her cheeks were very pale.

"It 's Ben! Ben 's in jail!" poor Kate faltered. "Did n't you know it?"

"In jail! What for? Who put him there?" were Caspar's hurried and excited questions.

"Dick Grimes had him put there. He charges him with stealing stamps."

It was now Caspar's turn to look pale.

"Stamps! *Ben* did n't steal the stamps!" he cried forlornly.

"Of course he did n't! But he was going away from the post-office, and Dick ran after him, and found the stamps just where he caught up with him, and a lot of men saw the stamps, too, so they put Ben in jail, and he has been there all night. Everybody really believes Ben

stole them!" And Kate broke down, sobbing at the thought.

"We've had *such* a night, Caspar, at our house! He sent word to us, as he was on his way, and papa went out to the jail at once, but he could n't do anything. The trial is to be at ten o'clock this morning. Oh, Caspar, can't your father do something?"

The suggestion roused Caspar from his dismay.

"Of course he can do something; and he will, right away. And Mr. Colton can do something. I'll run right over to Arthur's. You go home, Kate, and don't worry. They can't prove it on him."

So Kate went home, and Caspar set about his work of rescue. But ah, what a heavy heart the boy had! "Ben in disgrace! Ben Earle called a thief!" In this way his conscience kept talking to him. "And *you* are the thief, Caspar Grace. The only way Ben can really be cleared is for *you* to confess."

Caspar made up his mind to confess it all; and then came the thought of the jail and the trial, and may be state's prison, or anyway the house of correction.

"But no one will believe it of Ben," Caspar assured his conscience. "They will simply know it is one of Dick Grimes' lies. They can't *prove* a thing. It won't hurt Ben a mite,

while if *I* should confess" — here Caspar shuddered.

President Grace had a recitation at ten o'clock, but he postponed it in order to appear at the trial. Mr. Colton had an important engagement at the bank, but he put it off. Moreover, he obtained the services of his friend Judge Miller, an old lawyer who had long since left the bench, but whose wits were as keen as ever, while his reputation extended over all the neighboring counties.

A large crowd filled Squire Holbrook's office long before ten o'clock. The friends of the young prisoner made an imposing array, for not a few of the leading men in town were there, in addition to those I have named, and all of them were eager to speak a good word for Ben. Kate and her mother remained, trembling, at home, but Mr. Earle was there, his face showing his anxiety. As for Arthur and Caspar, it was all they could do to keep back the tears.

But Mr. Grimes and Dick were also there, with a strong showing of their set, the men whom *The Reformer* had begun to oppose so effectively. They laughed and winked joyfully at one another; and when the constable brought in Ben, keeping a tight grip on his arm, an exultant sound ran through their ranks.

Ben was pallid, and showed traces of the

night he had passed, but he held up his head and looked at his father and his friends with a confident smile.

Squire Holbrook cleared his throat, giving an important "Hem!" He was a very large man, with bushy white hair, and spectacles pushed up over his forehead. He wore the spectacles in order to look wise, it was said; at any rate, he was never known to look through them. Few persons in town could remember when the squire was not a squire. Term after term he was placed in office as a matter of course. Indeed, every one liked the old fellow, and admired the shrewd justice which he had so long dealt out.

"What 's the case, Sanders?" he asked.

"This prisoner, your honor, is Benjamin Earle. He is charged with stealing from the post-office a box of two-cent stamps, valued at eighty-five dollars."

"Who 's the plaintiff?"

"Mr. Grimes, your honor, and the principal witness is Richard Grimes, his son."

"Well, Dick Grimes, what do you know about it? Speak up."

With that Dick told his story, slyly passing over the fact that he had neither seen the box in Ben's hands nor seen him throw it away.

Mr. Grimes followed, describing what he was pleased to call "the prisoner's dastardly attempt

to defraud the United States government by obtaining illegal rates for a disgusting little paper of his." He ascribed the theft of the stamps to Ben's desire for revenge.

The next witnesses were the men from the stores, who had been drawn to the scene by Dick's outcry. Their testimony merely established the facts that Ben Earle was seen on the spot and that the box of stamps lay near him.

"Is that the whole of your case, Si Grimes?" asked the squire, addressing the postmaster.

"All at present, your honor," said Mr. Grimes, implying that he had any amount of evidence in reserve.

"Now," said the old squire, turning to Ben, "what have you got to say for yourself, young feller? Your looks, anyway, don't *stamp* you as a thief."

The squire liked to have his little joke, and he chuckled over his pun.

"I have never touched these stamps, sir," said Ben. "I merely went into the office to post some letters, and came away. I saw that the delivery window was open, but I did not touch or particularly notice anything inside. There was no one in the office, so far as I know, and I can only offer you my word, — unless some one will speak for my good character. The first I knew of the matter was when Dick

ran after me and laid hands on me. Then I, like others, saw the stamps lying by the fence."

"A truly virtuous boy!" sneered Mr. Grimes, while his party indulged in various mocking remarks.

"Silence in the court!" called the squire, sternly. Then he turned in an expectant way toward Ben's friends.

It was impressive testimony they gave, one after another, the solid, substantial men of the village. Mr. Earle spoke first, and his few, straightforward words were said in the midst of a perfect stillness which showed that every one present understood what this matter meant to that father. Then the college president had his say, speaking of the many hours that Ben had spent at his house, and of his uniformly high character as he had observed it, and that he was glad to have his son in the company of that kind of boy. The banker followed, and Ben's minister, his teachers in day school and Sunday school, several merchants, and last of all arose Judge Miller, tall in spite of his age, and very impressive with his white hair and strong features.

"May it please the court," he said, bowing to the squire with a deference which greatly gratified that personage, "I should like to have the first witness sworn."

"Stand up, Dick," commanded the squire, "and hold up your right hand."

Dick obeyed, but growing suddenly pale, and lowering his eyes as he took the obligation to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and called upon God to bear witness.

Then Judge Miller, fixing his deep-set black eyes upon Dick's shifting ones, delivered a lecture on the character of an oath, spoke of the crime of perjury, and described the punishment meted out to that crime. After this warning, he began to cross-examine Dick.

First he made the boy confess that he had left the delivery door unlocked, and so exposed the stamps to robbery. This gave the judge an opportunity, by a few quiet questions, to expose the carelessness common in the village post-office, and to hold up Mr. Grimes and his subordinates as unworthy government servants.

Next he brought out, by a series of questions, the story of Dick's attempt to join the Caxton Club, and was about to catechize the boy regarding the destruction at the club-house; but Mr. Grimes objected to the introduction of that matter, and the squire ruled it out. However, Judge Miller had already made his point, which was to show that there was a motive for Dick to charge Ben with theft.

"And now," declared Judge Miller, "we come to the main questions; and again I desire to warn this young man that he is under oath, and to remind him of the heavy penalties attached to the crime of perjury. Richard Grimes, did you, at any time, actually see that box of stamps in Ben Earle's possession?"

"I object to the question!" shouted Mr. Grimes.

"Why do you object?" asked the squire.

"Because it has been proved that Ben Earle had that box of stamps. Was n't it found right at his feet? How else could it have got there, I 'd like to know?"

"Judge Miller's question," said the squire, "is a proper one, and the witness must answer."

Judge Miller repeated the question.

The wretched witness faltered and stammered. At last he said, "I don't know. It was too dark to see plainly. But he must have had it, or how could he throw it away?"

Dismissing Dick with a contemptuous wave of his hand, Judge Miller summed up his case. He reminded the squire, significantly, that Dick had brought no evidence to prove his honesty and good character. He reviewed what had been said about Ben's upright life. He inquired why the witness and his father were so unwilling to have the wreck of the club-house inquired

into. Finally, he brought out the fact that no one had seen Ben with the stamps, and that it would have been as just to accuse the squire himself, if he had happened to be passing near the box. "There was a thief, of course," Judge Miller concluded, "but it was not Benjamin Earle."

I have said nothing about Caspar through all this scene. The lad was sitting there, almost frantic with grief, and fear, and shame. He knew what he ought to do. He knew that a single sentence from him would free Ben at once from suspicion, but it would put *him* in his friend's place. It would hand him over to the constable and the jail. Caspar trembled at the very thought.

And then, as before, he began to argue with himself. No one really believed it of Ben, not even Ben's enemies believed it; he was coming out of it all right. Judge Miller would bring him out of it all right. Squire Holbrook would do the right thing. Why should he ruin his own life needlessly?

So did the tortured boy argue with his conscience — and sit still. Half dazed, he heard Judge Miller's concluding remarks, heard the squire pronounce his decision that nothing had been proved against Ben, and bid the constable let him go. He sat there and watched Ben's friends congratulate him; and he, who had usu-

ally been the very first to leap to his side, was now the last to speak to him.

Alas for Caspar!

But Ben was free. Ben Earle walked out of that court room no longer a boy; the hard experience had made of him a young man. He was never again quite what he was before. And beside, the wretched affair was not yet at an end, because there came out of it something very important, which I have still to relate.

XII.

PRESIDENT GRACE HAS A WORD TO SAY.

For if you think that the Grimeses, father and son, ceased their evil efforts after their defeat before Squire Holbrook, you little know them. I have already said that Mr. Grimes was one of the owners of *The Gardner Graphic*, and it will be remembered that it was in the *Graphic* printing-office that Mr. Earle was foreman. Every one connected with the office liked Mr. Earle. The editor admired his skill, his accuracy, and his faithfulness. The compositors and pressmen loved him for his kindness and his justice.

There was rebellion among the *Graphic* employees, therefore, when, the day after Ben's trial, Mr. Grimes walked in, his face heavy with a scowl, and dismissed Mr. Earle from his position.

"You get out of here, Sam Earle," he commanded. "Never show your face here again. You 're the father of a thief, and you 're probably no better yourself. Anyway, I won't run the risk of having you around. You clear out instantly."

The whole force of printers growled under their breath, but they did n't dare say a word. One of them went to the editor, and Mr. Stanwood came hurrying out of his office.

"Why, Mr. Grimes," he ventured, very respectfully, "I don't see how we can spare Earle. He is invaluable. The paper can't get along without him, and his character is above reproach."

"Mind your own business, Stanwood, if you don't want to go too," snarled Mr. Grimes, stalking out of the office. Mr. Stanwood had become familiar with the brutal power of his employer, through five years of hateful service. He was not a man of spirit, or he would long ago have left his position; now he dared only to sympathize with the dismissed foreman, and offer to do what he could toward getting him a place in some other printing establishment. How difficult that would be, however, both he and Mr. Earle knew very well.

Once more the Grace front door-bell was rung as a signal of distress, but this time it was Ben, and not Kate, whom Caspar found there. Ben had not the heart to give the usual summons, the "flicker" whistle.

Caspar, whose conscience had let him sleep little that night, saw at once that something was the matter.

"What *is* it, Ben?" he cried. "Anything more that is bad?"

"I should say so!" groaned Ben. "Father is discharged."

"Discharged? How? Who did it? Why?"

"Mr. Grimes did it, because, he said, father was probably a thief as much as I. Caspar, I don't believe I should have got out that last number of our paper if I'd remembered that Mr. Grimes owns *The Graphic* — or part owns it, anyway. And now what *are* we to do? One thing, I'm going to leave school and try to earn money till father gets another place."

Caspar groaned. Here was more fruit of his thoughtless act, and the cowardice that followed it. "But," he began at once to argue with his conscience, "it wasn't the stamps; that was only a pretext. Mr. Earle would have been discharged anyway, on account of *The Reformer*."

So he comforted Ben as best he could, telling him how sure he was that *The Graphic* could n't be run without his father, and anyway such a good printer as Mr. Earle would not be long without a job.

A cheery voice out of the hall broke in on their talk. "Well, boys," President Grace said, "why are your faces so long? You ought to be jubilant this morning; but Caspar has been as

solemn as an owl, and now here 's Ben just as gloomy. What 's up, boys? "

In one long sentence Caspar told the latest outrage, and President Grace was as indignant as the two boys.

"I 'm going to see that Grimes right away," he said, taking his hat.

"Oh, *will* you?" cried Ben and Caspar together, feeling that their troubles were fairly off, now that President Grace had taken them upon his shoulders.

President Grace at once strode away to the post-office, leaving the boys to bright imaginings concerning the interview and its results. Something would certainly happen. Something always did happen when President Grace undertook business.

Postmaster Grimes was found sitting on the counter at the post-office, talking to a company of his friends, who were just then particularly hilarious. "He 'll have to leave town, of course," he was saying.

"I want to speak with you, Mr. Grimes," said President Grace.

"Well, here I am," answered Mr. Grimes, swinging his legs against the counter.

"You 'll not want any one else to hear what I have to say," said President Grace. "I think we would better retire."

The postmaster hesitated. He knew that the President of Albemarle College was not in the habit of making statements for effect. At last he growled out, "*I*'m not afraid to talk before any one," but led the way to his inner office.

"Mr. Grimes, I have just heard of the contemptible thing you did this morning," said President Grace.

"Now, look here, Mr. Grace, if you think you're going to" —

"I'm going to give you an opportunity to restore Mr. Earle to his position," went on President Grace.

"Oh, you are, are you?" Mr. Grimes sneered.

"Will you do it, and at once?"

Mr. Grimes twisted uneasily in his chair. "Suppose I propose to manage my business in my own way. What are you going to do about it?"

"I will tell you, Mr. Grimes, exactly what I will do if you don't take back Mr. Earle at once. I'll call a meeting of the best men in the town. Every storekeeper that advertises in *The Graphic* will be there, every doctor, every minister, every substantial farmer, and pretty much your entire list of subscribers, together with all the men that give you job printing to do. I can bring them together, and you know I can. At that meeting we will do three things. First, we will

agree henceforth to have nothing more to do with your paper, not to subscribe for it, or advertise in it, or give you any printing to do. Second, we will organize a company to publish a paper that will be a credit to the town. I know who will run its composing-room, and I know a young man who is rapidly growing up to be its editor. Third, we will send to Washington a petition for your removal from the post-office, and the petition will be one that cannot be refused. You know I can bring all this about, and you know I mean business. Now, will you take back Mr. Earle?"

XIII.

N. A. P. A.

Mr. Grimes did not answer immediately, but his chin dropped, his eyes fell, and President Grace knew that the day was won. The postmaster began to grumble about "persecution," and "ruining his business," and "forcing a thief upon him," but the president was inflexible, and would not leave without a definite surrender.

The result was that Ben was speedily in happy possession of the following note, which President Grace gave him to hand to his father:

Samuel Earle: I suppose you may go back to work, and let this be a warning to you.

Silas Grimes.

And so the hard experience came to an end; at least some important parts of it came to an end.

For Ben and Caspar the hardness kept right on. You may well believe that Dick Grimes and his particular friends made the most of their opportunities. They knew that in reality the charge against Ben stood simply "Not proven!"

"Stop, thief!" they often called out when Ben was on the street. "Thief!" some one labelled his desk at school. "Thief!" some one pinned on his coat at recess. They got a rusty pair of handcuffs and came to Ben in a crowd, politely asking him to show them how they were adjusted. There was drawn upon the school blackboard a face looking out from behind iron bars. "Give us a song, bird, jailbird!" some one would shout in his hearing.

These tortures wore upon Ben. He was light-hearted no more. He knew that he had a host of friends; he knew that no one worth heeding believed him guilty. He held up his head manfully, and tried not to mind the taunts and to forget his trouble; but his enemies would not allow him to forget it, and in spite of himself he constantly brooded over it.

Caspar saw it all. Oh, yes, Caspar saw everything, heard everything. He was always near Ben. Not a cruel jest aimed at Ben but stung him more. He lay awake of nights, going over his own cowardly part in the affair, and feeling in imagination Ben's daily tortures. Many a night he made up his mind to be brave and honest, to confess it all, and take whatever consequences might come. Then with the bright morning light his courage would ooze away.

The Reformer perished with its second number and that famous "extra." It came to an end on Mr. Colton's quiet advice, heartily accepted by the entire Caxton Club.

"It has a little too pretentious a name," said Mr. Colton, "for a paper run by three boys and a girl, even by such boys and *such* a girl!" and he bowed gallantly to Kate, who returned the bow jauntily. "Continue the paper, if you wish to, and give attention to village reforms, if you like; but my impression is that you will be wiser to show how things may be bettered rather than criticising officials directly. And as for the name, I always liked the title Ben had for his paper, *The Learner*. It is a modest name, and it would exactly fit such a journal as you mean to conduct. That 's what all men are, even the wisest of them, — just learners."

The suggestion was received at once with entire favor. *The Reformer* was buried without a word, and *The Learner* was restored as the organ of the Caxton Club.

It became a notable success. In the history of amateur journalism which is yet to be written (for though such histories are in print they are small and incomplete), a great deal of attention will be given to *The Learner*. It became widely known very speedily throughout the N.A.P.A., the National Amateur Press Association. Rep-

utations are rapidly made in the N.A.P.A., and they pass away as rapidly.

The Learner deserved its fame. No paper in all its wide exchange list was so neatly printed, with so nice a choice of type and so free from errors. No paper was so well edited, so sensible, so original, so bright, so practical. All four members of the Caxton Club put into it their best brains, and floods of time. Besides, they obtained contributions from all the good writers in town; and since it was a college town, these were many. It made no more sensations, but it exerted a steady influence for the improvement of the village.

Inquiries came from other papers, "Who is the editor-in-chief of *The Learner?*" and the club always insisted on answering, "Arthur Colton." Neither Ben nor Caspar, for reasons you can easily understand, would accept that proud title; and as for Kate, though all the boys were ready to exalt her to the leadership, she declared that her "feeble effort" was able only to keep her afloat as a subordinate.

Arthur was growing ambitious; there was no doubt about it. Not a few papers had urged that the editor-in-chief of *The Learner* would make the best possible president of the N.A.P.A. The suggestion was plainly not displeasing to Arthur; and as for Ben, Caspar, and Kate, they

flung up their hats for it. The mysterious "Lee Brane" was one of the most powerful advocates of Arthur's candidacy, and promoted it by articles in many papers.

"That settles the possibility that Lee Brane is Dick Grimes," said Caspar, after showing the club one of those articles, "though I never thought it possible that he could be."

"I 've gone over and over all the persons in town that might be Lee Brane, and I give him up," said Arthur. "I believe he 's some fellow out in the country who gets his mail here."

It was after thirty or forty of the best amateur papers in the land had placed "Arthur Colton" at the head of their national ticket, and urged his election in editorials full of such fine phrases as "an honor to our cause" and "the pride of Amateurdom," that Arthur made his great announcement to Ben and Caspar.

"Boys," said he, "papa has said I can go to Boston to the N.A.P.A. meeting. And, boys, he has given me money to take you, too. Don't say no, for I shall need you to electioneer for me!"

XIV.

HO, FOR THE HUB!

WELL, what could the boys say? It was not in boy's heart to refuse such an invitation, in any case; and now that Arthur put it as a personal favor, it was impossible.

And so it came about that one beautiful summer day three boys entered the sleeper of the "through train" that would carry them to New York, whence they would go to Boston — that mysterious New York sleeper, at whose glories they had taken many a peep from the station platform, but in it had never before popped their heads. A friend of Mr. Colton's was to meet them in New York and escort them to the Boston boat, so that the fears of the three mothers were allayed. "Besides," President Grace said, "I 'd as soon trust Ben Earle as a man, any day."

Kate stood on the platform and waved her sunbonnet after them. For one wild moment she wished she were a boy. "Just think!" she said to herself. "They are going to see Bunker Hill Monument, and the place of the Tea Party,

and the homes of Longfellow and Lowell and Holmes; yes, and maybe the house where Miss Alcott lived. And they will see Paul Revere's house, too, and the church where the lanterns were hung out, and — now look here, Kate Earle! you ought to be simply feeling glad your brother can go — that brother who has so much to trouble him!"

If Kate could have followed her brother across Ohio and Pennsylvania and New Jersey she would have been more and more thankful to see how his spirits rose. Indeed, with the glorious rush of the train, all the boys soon got in high glee, and for the first time since the troubles I have been describing returned to their old-time jollity.

Everything was interesting. The berths — how they were let down for the night and put up for the day; the luxuries of the dining-car; the splendors of the mountains; the smoky allurements of the great manufacturing cities; the glimpse of Philadelphia; the New Jersey flats; the ferry over the Hudson, and New York's panorama of marvellous "sky-scrapers;" the Fall River steamer, to which they were safely conducted by Mr. Colton's business friend; the superb trip around the great city into the Sound, past the statue of Liberty, and under the monster Brooklyn bridge; the splendors of the immense

floating hotel; the joy of sleeping for the first time on the water — "actually on a branch of the Atlantic Ocean;" the railroad journey next morning up through the lovely New England hills and meadows and long sea inlets; the first glimpses of Boston, as the boys passed through the imposing Providence station and took a street car for their hotel.

Ah, it was a glorious journey!

Exhilarated by all they had seen, and wearing the air of old travellers, our three lads stepped up to the clerk's desk to register. The hotel — Young's — was the N.A.P.A. headquarters, right in the heart of the old city. They scanned the register eagerly, therefore, to see what names distinguished in Amateurdom they could find.

"Henry Carter is here," said Ben, pointing to the autograph of the popular editor of *The Argonaut*, who had himself served two terms as president of the N.A.P.A.

"And Walter Norcross — see!" cried Caspar, bending over the neat penmanship of that brisk writer.

"Is Lee Brane's name down?" asked Arthur. "We *must* find out about him."

Here Caspar gave a low whistle, and silently pointed to the name "Richard Grimes," scrawled in Dick's awkward script.

"He must have come by the Big Four,"

Caspar said. "We might have known he would be on hand, if he saw by his exchanges that there was a chance of your being chosen president."

Dick was indeed there, and very much at home among a certain set of the boys. They saw him in the breakfast room, for the great hotel had set apart one room for the members of the N.A.P.A., where they could eat together. There Dick was hard at work, chatting with this lad, whispering to that, and causing many to look around at the three members of the Caxton Club. The candidate for the presidency whom he was pushing, in opposition to Arthur, was Edgar Bolton, a wealthy young fellow also from Ohio. It was agreed on all hands that one of the Middle States should have the presidency that year; but Bolton, though his journal, *The Buckeye Blade*, was printed on beautiful, heavy paper, in fine style, yet was an empty-headed boy, whose articles and editorials were large-sounding but bare of sense. For several years he had sought the presidency, but in vain. Never before, however, had he found so zealous an advocate as Dick.

Ben and Caspar began at once to push the claims of their candidate. Nearly every member of the convention was known to them by name.

With many of them they had corresponded. With all they had exchanged papers.

First they hunted up the editors that had already come out for Arthur, introduced themselves, and obtained from them introductions to others. Our two electioneers were earnest in their praise of Arthur, and won many new friends for him.

It was Colton against Bolton, for there were no other prominent candidates, though probably half the boys in the convention were candidates on a small scale. No national Republican or Democratic convention can equal in the fierceness of its work a convention of the N.A.P.A.

For the first day, however, while the young editors were gathering at Young's Hotel, this electioneering had to come in as a by-the-way, so full a programme of sight-seeing had the Boston boys laid out for their guests. Soon after breakfast, under the escort of several friendly reporters, they visited Newspaper Row, near by.

This was indeed a printers' paradise. The narrow street, with the tall buildings rising on either hand, the newsboys' shrill cries, and the fascinating bulletin boards, lettered with a summary of the news from all parts of the world, would have held the Caxton Club for a long while if their guides had not hurried them on.

Indeed, that very morning, as it happened, a notable yacht race was being sailed off Sandy Hook, and in front of the various newspaper buildings were large blackboards, beside which telegraph instruments were ticking away. The progress of the rival yachts was shown on the blackboards as fast as the telegraph flashed the news, and the hurrahing crowds in the street below were practically spectators of the race that was going on hundreds of miles away.

Inside the tall buildings, however, it was still more wonderful. They were admitted to the editors' rooms, and honored with a hearty but very brief greeting from those dignitaries. "It 's always an editor's busy day, you know, boys. Keep your heads level, do good work, and you 'll make your mark in our business." That was the way the editors talked to their callers, and then turned and scribbled off gay paragraphs about them.

In the composing-rooms there was one great curiosity to nearly all the boys. The Boston papers were just beginning to introduce type-setting machines, and several different kinds were to be seen. All were played like typewriters by skilled operators, but in one of them the type slid down in long lines, one letter after another being released by a touch on the magic keys, while in another the type was actually cast as

the keys were moved, and the lines came out solid blocks of fresh metal — a most surprising contrivance!

But of all the marvels — and there were many — nothing equalled the press-rooms. The presses were running off "extras" as fast as they could during the yacht race, and every press-room was fairly rocking with excitement. The noise was deafening to the boys, though the workmen seemed able to hear one another speak without difficulty. Over and under, under and over, the endless sheets of paper flew through the immense machines, doubling here, turning a corner there, quivering with the frantic haste, at this place receiving from the big rollers the impress of six pages, at that place the impress of a dozen more, and at the bottom spurting out in a flood of complete papers, printed, folded, pasted, and cut, — pat-pat-pat-patpatpat — as fast as drops ever fell in a summer shower.

The Caxton Club looked at those machines in amazement. Said Caspar afterward, "I did n't think that anything could do the work and not be alive!"

I cannot take space to describe that crowded day, much as I should like to. The boys went to the Public Library. They visited the old State House, where the Colonial Council assem-

bled, and saw Ben Franklin's wooden printing-press. They went to the Old South Church, and saw the window through which Joseph Warren stepped to deliver his famous oration on the Massacre. They stood on the spot where the tea was thrown overboard — now a paved street. They entered the curious old church from whose towers Paul Revere's lanterns flashed across to the Charlestown shore. They saw Paul Revere's house, with its quaint overhanging second story. They climbed the great shaft of Bunker Hill monument, and saw the scores of towns outspread far below, with the ships dotting Boston Harbor, and the blue Atlantic in the distance. And in the evening they enjoyed a delightful talk from one of Boston's great men, Edward Everett Hale, who wrote two of the books on Ben Earle's book shelves, "The Man without a Country," and "In His Name," and delighted them with memories of his own newspaper days, and told them many a tale of Webster and Sumner, of Garrison and Wendell Phillips, of Longfellow and Lowell, and the other giants of old Boston whom he had known well.

Altogether, when the three members of the Caxton Club tumbled into bed that night it was an hour before they could get to sleep, because their heads were so full of new ideas, and

their tongues so busy with what they had seen and heard during their first day at the Hub.

If they had known what was to happen on the morrow, they would not have slept at all.

XV.

THE TRANSOM.

THE next morning, behold, in the most spacious parlor of Young's Hotel, the N.A.P.A. in solemn session!

Arthur's heart failed him when he looked on that large company of boys. If elected, could he ever make a speech of acceptance? If he ever made his opening speech, could he preside over the meetings? If he presided over the meetings, could he conduct the affairs of this great body during the coming year? Arthur, though naturally courageous and active, possessed of a quick and keen mind, had been housed away from other boys and their life, and he suddenly felt that his ambition was overleaping itself, and was daring what he began to see was too high for his sweep.

"If I had realized," he whispered to Caspar, "what a big thing this is, I should not have tried for the presidency. I 've a mind to back out now."

"Nonsense!" whispered Caspar. "Guess you can do as well as that stick of a Bolton!" That thought was a relief to Arthur.

As rapidly as possible the preliminaries were got out of the way, and the convention entered the battle for which all were eager — the struggle for the presidency.

First came speeches of nomination, and these were many; for, as I have said, almost half the boys were willing to take the exalted office, and the other half were willing to place them in nomination, expecting a return of the favor next year. Most of the nominating speeches were brief, merely a sentence or two, being made by bashful boys. Others had been carefully thought out and recited the entire history of the candidate, from his birth to the present time, setting forth also his claims to the presidency.

But it was soon recognized that two candidates alone had any chance of election. Bolton was nominated by Dick Grimes, in a speech of considerable ability, for Dick had brains, though he chose to put them to bad uses. His speech was full of sly thrusts at Arthur. *His* candidate was not a recent arrival in Amateurdom, but had for years been a hard worker in the ranks. *His* candidate was not entirely unpractised in parliamentary law, but for years had taken part in their annual conventions. *His* candidate was not personally unknown to the convention, but had for years been a faithful friend to them all. *His* candidate was not, like others, backed by

persons of no character, by jailbirds, by thieves, but by the most respected amateurs in the ranks.

At the last shot Caspar grew pale with anger; he clinched his hands, and his breath came fast.

Bolton's nomination was seconded by the secretary of the convention, and it was soon made plain, by many rulings in Bolton's favor, that the president also was on his side.

Ben had been chosen to nominate Arthur. As he rose to speak he was received with hisses from Bolton's champions, and with cries of "Stamps! Stamps! Stamps!" One fellow had brought in an iron chain, or had it in hiding, clanking it at this point and now and then throughout Ben's speech, to the vast amusement of Bolton's comrades.

"Mr. President," Caspar shouted, "call the convention to order!"

"The chair knows its business," the president answered shortly.

With a white face, yet with straightforward sentences, Ben spoke for his friend, urging his proved ability, his zeal for the cause, his high personal character (and poor Ben choked here, and the chain rattled), his leisure and abundant means, mentioning also the many important papers that championed his cause.

One of the most respected of those friendly editors seconded Ben's speech, somewhat too briefly, evidently being daunted by the way in which Ben was received. Then the convention fell to balloting.

On the first ballot, every man voted, of course, for the person he had nominated, and these complimentary votes made the result quite "scattering," though it was apparent that Bolton and Colton were in the lead.

This was made very plain by the second ballot, which divided the boys almost equally, Colton being in the lead, but without enough votes to elect him.

So it remained for an hour, neither side yielding an inch. Each balloting occupied considerable time, and much had been spent in the nominating speeches, so that only eleven ballotings were made before lunch, when, in high excitement, the boys adjourned for an hour.

Bolton and his company were conspicuously absent from the N.A.P.A. dining-room, and it was soon known that he had hired a separate room, and was giving his followers an especially fine repast. This news cast a gloom over Arthur's company, because it looked like superior enterprise; but Caspar went everywhere, insisting that they preferred brains to oysters, and rallied his forces from their depression.

After lunch the battle went on much as before. Each side, in excited conversation, attacked the members of the opposing party that were supposed to be doubtful. Argument was heaped on argument, persuasion on persuasion, but without result. The twentieth ballot, the twenty-first, the thirtieth, the thirty-first — and still no change!

Then it was that Dick moved a recess of half an hour, a motion which the president declared passed without calling for the dissenting votes. Immediately the president and secretary, Dick, Bolton, and all his supporters, hurried from the room.

"They have gone to hatch up some trick or other," said Caspar.

The half hour passed, and they did not return. Forty minutes, forty-five, and Arthur's company began to look blank.

Scouts were sent forth, and were a long time in their explorations around the hotel.

At length one of them returned, and shouted, "They 've bolted! The Boltonites have bolted! They have the president and secretary, and I suppose they think they 're the N.A.P.A! They 're electing their whole list of officers! I heard them through the keyhole!"

Caspar jumped up, furious. The events of the day had aroused all the combativeness that was

in him. "Show me where they are!" he cried, and his entire force hastened after him.

Reaching the closed door, he hammered on it, and shook it with all his might.

"Let us in!" he cried. "This is n't legal! Let us in!"

A roar of laughter came through the open transom.

That transom gave Caspar an idea.

"Here, fellows," he whispered, "boost me up there. I 'll get in and open that door! We 'll see if" —

He was lifted on ready shoulders before finishing the sentence.

As his head appeared in the opening, followed by half his body, another roar, this time of anger, greeted him. The tallest of the boys within sprang to push him back.

"No!" cried Dick. "Pull him through! We 'll show him!" And he made a jump, caught Caspar by the neck, and jerked him, head-foremost, to the floor.

The boys on the outside perceived a sudden hush within. There was reason enough for it. Caspar was stretched out motionless, and, to all appearances, dead.

XVI.

"FORGIVE ME!"

THE N.A.P.A. conducted no more business that day.

The hotel clerk, to whom one of the boys ran, summoned the nearest physician. When he came, he found Caspar in his room, to which he had been carried by four scared-faced boys. He had begun to breathe heavily, and his face was as white as the sheet on which he lay.

"Bad business, this!" exclaimed the doctor as soon as he saw him. "Alone in the city? You his friends?" as Ben and Arthur were pointed out. "Telegraph at once for his father to come on!

"No, he is n't dying," the doctor added, answering Arthur, "but it 's a serious case — very!" By this time he was far in an examination of the injured boy.

Ben telegraphed for President Grace, wording his message with care, and then hastened back to get the doctor's verdict.

"He has a chance," said the doctor; "but he must be kept absolutely quiet, and he must have a trained nurse. Shall I send one?"

"Certainly," said Arthur, telling who he was, and who Caspar's father was.

The nurse speedily arrived — a sweet-looking, daintily dressed, exceedingly capable young woman, who at once took entire control in the sick-room.

The chamber next door was occupied by convention delegates, but they vacated it, that it might be used by Ben and Arthur. A door communicated between the two rooms. This was unlocked, but kept closed.

The boys, in their intense anxiety, had no thought of dinner. They sat talking in whispers, debating how soon Mr. Grace would arrive, and going over the events that had led to the accident.

About eight o'clock Caspar fell into a delirium. The two boys could hear him through the closed door. His ravings were terrible, and now and then he gave a scream.

Once Arthur and Ben opened the door and looked in, but the nurse waved them back.

"You can't do anything," she whispered, "and you might excite him more."

About nine o'clock there came a rap at the door. It was Dick — Dick Grimes.

He was haggard and downcast, and his voice trembled as he spoke.

"How — how — is he?"

"Listen!" said Ben, sternly, and there was silence in the room as moan after moan came from the sufferer.

Dick groaned. "Oh, fellows," he asked, "will you ever forgive me? I did n't mean to hurt him. I just meant to pull him in and keep him prisoner awhile. I never thought of his falling on his head."

A cry from the sick boy stopped Dick.

"I suppose I can't see him?" he said, after a moment.

"No; the nurse won't let *us*, even."

"Well, anyway, I 'll tell both of *you* something. I 'll feel easier, whatever — whatever — happens. I want to say, Arthur, to *you*, that I was the one who ruined your clubhouse, and I 'm going to pay for it when I get home. And I want to say to *you*, Ben, that I *did* see that you did n't have that box of stamps. And I 'm going to tell every one in the town that I knew all the time that you did n't!"

The boys were too much surprised to speak. After a minute, Ben silently held out his hand. Then Arthur held out his.

"I 'm ashamed of myself," stammered Dick, shaking hands but turning to go. "I 've been ashamed of myself ever since the trial, Ben, when I saw how you carried yourself, and what friends you had. But, somehow, I kept on act-

ing like a fool. And now this thing has happened. I *can't* make *this* thing right!"

"What 's your room, Dick?" Ben found voice to ask. "We 'll come at once if there 's any change in Caspar."

"One hundred and fifty-two," said Dick. "Good-night."

"Good-night — old fellow!" cried Ben; and the last two words were balm to the unhappy boy, who went away to a sleepless night.

Ben and Arthur had no time to talk over this unexpected event, for the nurse opened the door.

"Is one of you Ben?" she asked.

"*I* am."

"Well, then, I guess you 'd better come in. It 's against the doctor's orders, but he keeps calling for 'Ben,' and seems to have something on his mind. Perhaps if he told you what it is, he would get quiet. But don't stay more than a minute."

Ben went over to the bed, tiptoe.

"Want to see me, old fellow?" he asked cheerily.

"That you, Ben?" Caspar cried out, trying to sit up. "I am so glad you have come! I wanted to tell you *I* took those stamps from the office! You 'll hate me, Ben, but don't be too hard on me! I did n't think. It was half in

fun. I threw them away just as soon as I thought it was stealing. And then, when they put it on you, I turned *such* a coward! But I have been so troubled, Ben, — oh, you 'd forgive if you knew *how* it has troubled me, Ben!"

"Caspar," said Ben, finding the sick boy's hand, "I *do* forgive you, with all my heart, so don't think any more about it."

"But the jail, Ben, — will they send me there? You know I must tell every one; yes, father and mother, and every one in town."

Ben told Caspar, rapidly, of Dick's visit and confession. "If we forgive him what he did you may be sure that he and his father will be glad to forgive you what you did, Caspar."

"Perhaps," sighed Caspar. "But I shall tell every one, Ben, just the same."

Here the nurse came up.

"You have talked as long as I dare have you," said she.

"It 's all right," said Caspar, looking at her brightly. "Good night, Ben, old chap."

It *was* all right, for in a few minutes the nurse came, smiling, into the boys' room.

"He 's sleeping quietly now," she said; "that means he will get well. Now you 'd better go to sleep yourselves. I 'll call you if there should be any change for the worse."

So the boys went to bed, though not until they had been to Dick's room with their good news.

But they were long in getting to sleep. It was while they were thus wakeful, reviewing many things, that two brilliant thoughts came to Arthur. The first thought, however, was not quite brilliant enough to do without the aid of the electric light, which, jumping up, he turned on.

"What *are* you about?" asked Ben, watching Arthur as he found a pencil and bit of paper.

"I 've an inspiration. Oh, Ben, you old humbug!"

"Are you growing crazy?" asked Ben, sitting up.

"No; my brain is all right, especially the Lee Brane section. How *stupid* in us not to have seen that the letters of 'Lee Brane' spell 'Ben Earle'!"

"Is *that* all?" laughed Ben. "Kate saw that weeks ago."

Going back to bed, Arthur indulged himself in several punches planted on the body of Lee Brane; but he did not pursue the subject, for his mind was busy with his second brilliant idea.

XVII.

PRESIDENT EARLE.

When the N.A.P.A. came together the next morning the members saw an unexpected sight. Ben was absent, caring for Caspar, but Arthur was there, sitting with Dick, the two talking together in the most friendly way imaginable.

This was presently explained, for as soon as the meeting was opened, Arthur rose and made the following speech:

"Mr. President, Fellow Editors: I rise to withdraw my name from nomination for the presidency. I thank all the fellows who stood by me yesterday, but really I have n't sufficient experience to be your president. I ought to have seen that before. But I will put in nomination some one who *is* worthy of the office, and that is Lee Brane."

Here there was a decided sensation, for Lee Brane had been a mystery to all the members, far and near, as well as to the Caxton Club. Indeed, it had begun to be whispered around that probably Arthur himself was the Great Unknown, and the rumor had won him many adherents.

"Yes, Lee Brane," proceeded Arthur, enjoying the sensation he had produced. "It was only last night that I thought out who he is. But you can see for yourself. Check off the letters in his name, and you will see that 'Lee Brane' spells 'Ben Earle.'"

On this announcement there was a second sensation, much greater than the first, and Dick Grimes led in a round of applause.

"You all know Lee Brane, that is, Ben Earle, as the most brilliant writer in all Amateurdom," went on the speaker. "He is also a brilliant editor. *The Learner* is more his work than that of any one else. The name is his, and most of the ideas. We others help, but he is the leader, the real editor-in-chief.

"There is also another point in his favor to be considered, but that will be brought out by my friend, Richard Grimes."

Still a third sensation as Dick arose, and the biggest one of all; for in a few manly words he withdrew whatever he had said against Ben's character, and apologized. He praised Ben in the highest terms he could think of, seconded the nomination with all his heart, and moved that the election be made unanimous.

This was done with a great hurrah, in which even Bolton, to his everlasting credit, had the grace to join.

Bolton himself, with Arthur and Dick, were appointed a committee to inform Ben of his election and escort him into the presence of the convention. This was done in due form, and he received a triple ovation, as Ben Earle, as Lee Brane, and as the new president of the N.A.P.A. The little ceremony — or as much of it as took place in the sick-room — was a cordial to Caspar; he watched and listened with sparkling eyes, and with a mind, for the first time in many weeks, quite happy and at peace.

And now my story is near its close.

I might tell of President Grace's gladness as he arrived and found his son rapidly recovering.

I might tell of the good time Arthur, Ben, and Dick enjoyed, tarrying in Boston till Caspar could bear the journey home — how they stood on Plymouth Rock, and on Concord Bridge, and on the village green at Lexington, and in the old Witch House in Salem.

I might tell, too, that as soon as Caspar was once more at home he made a straight confession to his father and mother of his thoughtless joke on the post-office; and that, moreover, for a long time he insisted upon taking a position out on the village green and proclaiming his bad deed to every passer-by, but that at last he was made

to see that this would not in any way serve the public good, since Dick's open exoneration of Ben was sufficient, and that the matter was finally settled by his being allowed to make a clean breast of it to Mr. Colton, Judge Miller, and Squire Holbrook.

I might tell, too, how Dick Grimes started out to grow manly and straightforward from the time of the convention, giving up his old associates and entering eagerly into his new opportunities of friendship; and how, one fine day, he was unanimously chosen the fifth member of the Caxton Club.

I might tell these things, and a dozen events besides; for the story of the club went right on. But I think the tale is long enough already.

Only, you should know that when Dick was elected, Caspar said, "You 're too late to be our D, Dick, for that letter was taken up by Kate *Davenport* Earle."

"Why, that 's all right," said Dick, "for now I can be your E. Did n't you know that my name is Richard *Edgar* Grimes?"

"Hurrah!" shouted Arthur. "You come straight and regular in the Caxton alphabet!"

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